

Interrogative Statements on Humanitarian Architecture

An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

by

Yung Hong

Thesis Advisor

Wes Janz

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ABSTRACT:

Humanitarian architecture, though it has existed for many years, lacks a formal definition and rigidity in its description and explanation. There are a variety of groups, organizations, and individuals that help formulate this profession. They each have developed a unique and specific scope of philosophies, objectives, missions, and insights on the subject and their unique career paths. Although these various methods of public architecture practices allow for creativity, individuality, and issue specific projects, they have also created a cluttered and disorganized comprehension of the field. The main concentration and analysis of this thesis is the search for clarity regarding humanitarian architecture. In doing so, the work provides a reaction and response towards the analytical questions posed within the criticism of social architecture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I would like to sincerely thank Wes Janz for advising me throughout this project, as well as for influencing and enlightening me during the past three years on the importance of being critically analytical of our design work, educational work, and the leading figures within our profession.

I would also like to thank Marjetica Potrc and Anthony Scarponi for their input towards my four e-mail interview questions.

Lastly, I would like to thank all of the humanitarian architects, non-profit organizations, urban think tanks, and the like that are continually committing their everyday work towards improving society's voice and living conditions.

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT:

The compilation of research from the thesis is set up into three parts. The first is the main overview section. Although presented in a question and answer format (Q&A), the 20 questions reflect the discussion that Wes Janz and I had during the analysis stage of the project. The answers that follow each of the 20 questions demonstrates the knowledge I have gained during this assignment. The second unit of work is the journals that I have composed. These journals are the thoughts, ideas, criticisms, resolutions, and struggles I had during the research and execution of the thesis. The third and final unit is the six architects. This component gives a short overview of the six individuals whose work I reviewed in my research. It is these questions answers, journals and architects that now influence my thoughts, ideas, and perspective regarding humanitarian architecture. The book format, layout, and design of my presentation are an expression of the past four years of architectural design education.



INTERROGATIVE STATEMENTS
ON
HUMANITARIAN
ARCHITECTURE

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PROFESSIONALISM

How did you get started?

There is not one resolute answer to this question. Every group, organization, team, and person who pursues the profession of humanitarian architecture, or that of similar trait, has had their own method of invention. In addition, it depends on which type of philosophy one's work adheres to. There is not a singular definition of humanitarian architecture or a list of five points it needs to meet. From that, there is an array of starting points for an individual. This ranges from a construction volunteer at Habitat for Humanity to a web designer uploading social awareness statistics to a student tweeting quotes from various social activists. As long as there is a commitment towards social and environmental improvement, a drive to help, and/or a passion for community collaboration, then the foundation of humanitarian architecture, or that of any social design work, can be laid.

2.

When you were young, did you envision yourself as becoming a sort of activist or an agent of change to humanity?

I do not believe myself to be an activist or an agent of change. I see myself as an individual who hopes to better my community through various projects, designs, and social awareness. I was not always interested in humanitarian architecture or social design; and still to this day, I'm not sure I can say with 100% confidence that it is my only interest. If anything, I have had much enthusiasm towards my community, the arts, and the values of hospitable living conditions. It is from those traits that my interest in social design has flourished.

3.

Do you think you have made a better impact through your work?

Although it is extremely flattering to be told one's work is making a "better impact," I cannot say with certainty that my work is. You do not ever really know how society is going to react to your work, so it's a bit impractical to believe even any impact is being made from it. In addition, the lack of impact may in itself be a lesson for future works. I try to continually stay critical towards my works and their reflection of my professional mission.

4.

Do you consider yourself an activist?

No. I believe that there are many titles that an individual in this line of work (humanitarian architecture) can call himself or herself, but the title holds little significance. The job description is quite loose and flexible, and the objective can be achieved in more than one way. Regardless of the title, it is the work that is evaluated. It is the work that informs the job title. It makes me a bit nervous what titles can do for an individual. At times, fellow students are so misled by Google keywords that they lose their ability to truly present and investigate an individual.

5.

What is an activist?

An activist is an individual that undermines the government in a cause that they believe can be made or done differently. Some individuals who do things illegally are considered to be activists (Odbert, "Power To The People: The Black Market For Electricity In Kibera - Megacities - Opportunities at Urban Edges - Forbes"). Some activists need to be respected and applauded for what they do, while others—not so much. Some humanitarian architects are considered to be activists because of their ability to bend and push society's rules within their projects ("Spatial Agency: Santiago Cirugeda").

Do you find yourself in a struggle with forming work/finding clients that provide you with a living wage?

It would make sense to assume that humanitarian architecture work is more limited and requires additional time than the conventional architectural work. However, this is not true. Since the field of social architecture lacks a solid description, there are many different types of projects that can be created. In addition, the field is so differently interpreted that it has a vast collection of subjects for projects to derive from. Since the profession is about the issues of society, it has the ability to adapt and change with social and cultural problems. This quality allows the clients to constantly vary.

For most cases, humanitarian architects attended the same universities as the conventional architects. From that foundation, most social architects are as skilled in critical thinking and design as that of an "architect." Nevertheless, public architects' interest in social, cultural, and economical issues allows them extra resources and versatility. At times their eclectic collection of talents allows them to appeal to different categories of clients, enabling them to bring in different projects.

“Living wage” is a subjective term. It greatly depends on where one is located, as well as one's living style. If a social architect is living in Mumbai, India then one's living cost is immensely different than that of an individual living in Luanda, Angola.

● How do you maintain your freestyle form of work in architecture against that of conventional architectural establishments?

Due to the different variety of work that comes through the office, there is an automatic originality in the technique of processing each of these assignments. The unfamiliarity and exploration of a problem is, in itself, a method of solution. This part of the arrangement tends to be overlooked and neglected because many individuals believe that they know the source of the problem. It is these overlooked variables that are the origin of the complication. Conventional firms lack the search for these primary conditions since their projects tend to be homogeneous. It is the regressing towards the basic elements and a yearning to fully understand the problem that creates a large separation between the design process of humanitarian architecture and conventional architecture.

8.

What made you leave/lose interest in that type of work?

I appreciate the range of work that is done in public architecture, as well as the collaborative atmosphere that these projects are conducted in. Each social architecture project has a stage that requires its exclusive unit of learning. From each project a certain amount of knowledge is gained. I enjoy learning about these new subjects. Usually the new information of the subject is explained and taught through an individual familiar with the history and context of the issue. The humanitarian architects in these situations are unbiased and opened minded. This cooperative atmosphere is not the same in a formal firm. It is this unique quality that makes me prefer social architecture.

9.

What tradeoffs do you have between the two?

Although there are many differences between the two professions, the core value of the two is the same—to design a solution. From that shared quality, it allows the tradeoffs to be indifferent. In addition the term “tradeoff” is all in the perspective of the individual.

10. Do you think there should be a physical limit to humanitarian architecture to avoid cultural and social barriers?

There are two answers to this question. The answer that one sides with depends on ones' personal values.

The first answer: yes, it should have its limits.

This mainly applies to the idea of cultural and social barriers. It is difficult to assimilate to an entirely new and different culture. This would take years, especially in terms of comprehending everything from the bottom to the top of the group. The time spent within these cultures is only for the duration of the assignment, usually a short enough time period in which not all cultural values can be understood. There are cultural values that cannot be explained, but are rather experienced. When humanitarian architects do projects in foreign countries they tend to get criticized for their lack of understanding in the culture (Nassbaum, Bruce.).

At times, the disapproval of social architects' work is from the locals. Natives criticized social architects for their inconsiderate personality. Local inhabitants are incredibly offended that a stranger (humanitarian architects) would explain the issue and provide a solution to them when they are all too familiar with the problem—a problem that they have been battling with for a long time. In addition, the residences' annoyance is only strengthened if the solution does not successfully function for an acceptable period of time (Nassbaum, Bruce.).

While this is rare, some individuals argue that assistance in third world countries is more harmful than it is helpful. These countries and peoples become more dependent on the help rather than less dependent. These countries' expectations of help from first world countries makes them less motivated and inexpedient in resolving their own issues. In addition, the stereotypic images of the third world natives that are used in advertisements of UNICEF and that of similar organizations bring complications. These pictures are oftentimes dramatized. These images do not help the morale of the individual or the third world country (Miller, Lisa.).

The second answer: no, public architecture should be unlimited and unbounded.

Although humanitarian architects know their community best, it should not limit their work. There is work to be done in both immediate and distant communities. When a client asks for a consultation, the individual should not be neglected because of his or her area of residence. As a humanitarian profession, the limit is on humanity and not the district.

Help should be given whenever and wherever it is needed.

There are methods to help lessen cultural and social barriers. Although not all methods are the most efficient or the quickest to achieve, such minimizing of barriers is possible. These boundaries should not be the apex of confinement within the architectural profession. Even though limitations should not exist within the design occupation, these engagements should be done with much sensitivity and caution.

Public architects typically spend a long time researching the community and its culture. In addition, some social architects are introduced to the project and its context by a local native. Some design groups go as far as having a local resident present through all stages of the design. This individual provides for community collaboration, ideas and feedback. This immersive type of design allows the foreign barriers to be broken ("Marjetica Potrc.").

Some social organizations have the luxury of being internationally based. This implies that they have several offices doing work in many different locations that continually interact. This allows for better formation of ideas and solutions. This method gives designers the opportunity to be in the midst of the foreign culture while still being able to correlate with the firms at home. Individuals are better connected due to today's technology. This allows for easier communication amongst everyone.

While it is rare, some humanitarian architects live in the nation of their project. They are directly sharing connections with the local inhabitants. These individuals invest a considerable length of time in learning the culture and lifestyle of the natives. In addition, they have the opportunity to personally work with the community residents. This method really obscures all boundaries and barriers that humanitarian architects can have ("Chelina Odbert and Jennifer Toy").

Should there be a better connection between the architects and their client (instead of a 2-4 week investigation period)?

A type of understanding and connection should always be made between the architect and the client. A comprehension of the context of the design problem and its objectives are really important. Although there is no set length of time for understanding the cultural barriers and project objectives, it is achieved more quickly if the designers are unbiased. There should be zero assumptions made about the community, culture, client, and project. The architect should approach the project with the attitude of knowing very little and preparing to learn a lot. This will allow for a more lucid understanding between the two parties.

12.

Should these architects do only a limited type of work?

The architectural profession is a very invasive profession. Architecture is a collection of professions rolled into one. It is extremely multifaceted and requires thorough knowledge in many areas. With that in mind, the idea of limiting architecture to just a singular form of work juxtaposes its very own constitution. There are many architects who have areas of expertise, but this broadens their design field rather than limiting it.

A major strength of architects is their ability to critically analyze a situation to develop the best solution. This quality allows architects to apply it to many other areas. The great thing about design is its lack of rigidity. Architects can use whatever production tool or method of execution they please. As long as the project objectives are achieved, then they have successfully conquered the problem. The final product can be as complex and complicated as a 250-story self-sustaining skyscraper or a simple global sustainability awareness graph.

Are architects really helping the community if they are the only one doing all the work?

Humanitarian architects may get a lot of the limelight behind the projects, but the “true creator” remains unclear. It is certain that the projects are done collectively so a single idea or task is rarely ever credited to a singular individual. Every aspect of information and built work is shared so that it is constantly enhanced. Although much of energy for the project may be lead or supported by social architects, it is not to be confused with the workload. Since local resident present the design project to the architect, it is extremely difficult to complete the project without the support and hospitality of the community members. For an assignment to be well designed and successfully created, the local members have to be supportive of and cooperative with the humanitarian designer.

14.

REFLECTION

14. How do you distinguish design genuinely focused on the community versus design that is meant to appear altruistic?

I am not sure if there is a way to distinguish the two types. I also do not know what characteristics would be considered when separating these two types. Even the most genuine individuals create unsuccessful community projects. The thing about humanitarian architecture is that there are many changing variables. Social issues are very hard to predict. To design a product that anticipates and controls an individual or a community's action is extremely difficult. The "failure" of the project can usually be avoided by the collaborative input of the local inhabitants.

I do not think there is anyone that actually does work to appear altruistic. However, there are methods of execution and post-project evaluations that could reflect carelessness towards community

designs. If an architect does not remain critical of one's own work then it is very likely to fall within this category. The varying philosophies behind humanitarian architecture can cause a misunderstanding of the individual architect's community design objectives. The incorrect selection in a professional title can heavily influence others' perspective on the individual's objective and work.

When do you stop to evaluate and reflect on your work?

Stopping and evaluating one's work is extremely critical in this profession. It is difficult to know exactly when this point of evaluation should be done, but it certainly should occur. There are many qualities that should be reviewed when one is assessing one's work. An important trait, in terms of humanitarian architects, is whether or not one's work abides by the social guidelines formulated by the individual's philosophy. Added to that, the project should be analyzed to see if it is positively contributing to the local community and its users. It is always significant to be critical of one's work. This allows room for improvement, and to objectively assess one's weaknesses and strengths.

16.

What is local work and local involvement?

Local work consists of project assistance lead by individuals that live within the community. The amount of labor done by the inhabitants of the community greatly varies. In some situations, the involvement is front-loaded. This involves introducing the humanitarian architect to the project and specific details on the project's history and context. While in other places, the engagement is heavily expressed. Residents can be found participating throughout the process from schematic to construction. It depends on the projects and differs from case to case. Although community cooperation is a large contribution to humanitarian projects, it is not the main factor. The success of a project is not dependent on this factor.

17.

When does the work initiative need to be done by the locals and no longer by the architect?

Initiatives from locals are always expected and welcomed. In some situations, the residents of the community have ideas, but lack the means to execute them. This is where humanitarian architects contribute. Depending on the project, some assignments are immediately repeated step-by-step while others are simply used as a method of education.

Projects that are intended for use by the group are usually started by locals. The first initial project is collaboratively done between humanitarian architects and the residents of the community. After the completion and success of the first, then the identical process is applied towards the second, third, and many other equivalent assignments. The installation of the proceeding design, that involves the same techniques as the first, is led by the residents of the community.

Since not all projects are created by groups, some approaches used to build the first construction task are shared and applied to different assignments. It is difficult to estimate how many locals apply these educational tactics to their own applications. However, such level of initiation is not far-fetched. Nevertheless, the likelihood of humanitarian architects being involved again within the same community, but on a different project is quite probable.

18.

Is it ever the lack of morale by the community that makes the issue difficult to resolve?

The morale of the community really helps the process of the project. It is important because it allows for better communication and collaboration between the two parties. Locals have a better understanding of the neighborhood and its qualities; therefore they are able to give useful input into the design and its potential problems.

If projects are not directly supported by the locals, then small portions of work can be done to gradually grab their attention. These early investigations can include survey work, research, or smaller size projects that inform the community on the need and logic behind the main project. An introductory set of projects can slowly persuade the attitude of the community and eventually gain their support and enthusiasm.

19.

Why are there only so few individuals who are committed to this task?

There are very many individuals who are committed to humanitarian architecture even though they might not be associated with that specific term. In a society in which titles are used to categorize and separate one's self, it is hard to not get caught up in all the labels. A variety of aid organizations and non-profit organizations focus on awareness and equality of health. A handful of renowned individuals and groups focus on local work and local habitats. It is very encouraging to witness so many people committed to the objective of bettering humanity and the environment.

20. Is the interest in humanitarian architecture growing?

Humanitarian architecture has existed for quite some time. This type of architecture is present in the most basic of architectural projects. The idea of providing hospitable shelter is, by definition, the idea of architecture. The theory of community collaborative projects has also been in existence for a lengthy period of time. Nevertheless, the term “humanitarian architecture” was not coined until a few decades ago. It, however, was not really recognized or accepted as a common architectural concentration and term until recently. There is definitely more curiosity in the profession today than there was a few years ago.

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Citizen

Antonio Scarponi

founder of Conceptual Devices, a think tank in Zurich, Switzerland ("Antonio Scarponi - About.").

Scarponi is an architect with a BA in architecture, as well as a PhD in Urban Design, from Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia. He also studied architecture at Cooper Union, NY. He has taught at KTH, Stockholm and NABA, Milan. He has lectured at various architecture and design schools throughout the United States and Europe. Scarponi's work has been exhibited internationally in museums and galleries. In 2008, he was a finalist for the first edition of the Curry Stone Design Prize ("Antonio Scarponi - About.").

Scarponi's work consists of a variety of projects using characteristics of architecture, multimedia art, and design. Much of his work creates awareness to the public through visual graphics or physical installations. A main objective for Scarponi's work is to change or create spaces so that it can transform common objects to provocative analytically critical pieces ("Subversive Design | Curry Stone Design Prize.").

"Design is a subversive practice; it has power to imagine reality arranged in a different way and with different order of values." - Antonio Scarponi; ("Subversive Design | Curry Stone Design Prize.")

Email Interview Questions

1. activism

As an activist, how do you think you have made/are making an impact in society through your projects/organizations?

_I do not consider my self an activist. I consider myself a citizen. As a citizen, I think the most revolutionary thing I can do is do my work right. I do not have control on the impact I have on other people. Nor I want to have it. I want to have impact and control on my life. All want to do is promote and offer what I do and improve the quality of it.

2. conventionalism

How do you keep your practice from becoming that of a conventional firm practice?

_Conventionalism is a way to look upon things. I try to look at conventional things in an unconventional way.

3. exposure_

How do you think humanitarian architecture should be represented compared to its current portrayal?

_I think, like in music, there are only two types of architecture: the good and the bad one. All architecture is for me humanitarian. I can not think of a non-humanitarian architecture. That does not mean it is all good. I believe a "good design" is a tangible fragment of a perfect world. It is an idea of the world. Willing to make a good design is revolutionary practice.

4. locality_

How extensive does the community members' role have to be in a project so that it is "local"?

_I do not think there is an unique answer to this question. Each project has its own scale and information to highlights. A community is not an homogeneous body. It is on the contrary very complex and most of the time happens that we have to design for the people who is not taking any decision. This could be a particular slice of the population, children or elders, but most of the times these are people who was not even born yet. Selecting and analyzing a community is a project already.

Artist

Marjetica Potrc

artist and architect based in Ljubljana, Slovenia ("Marjetica Potrc."). Potrc has a degree in architecture and sculpture from University of Ljubljana ("Marjetica Potrc."). She has had her work exhibited in showcases throughout the world. A few showings include the Venice Biennial (2003 & 2009), Sao Paulo Biennial (1996 & 2006), Centre Pompidou-Paris (2010), Guggenheim Museum- New York (2001) and many, many more. She has also been a visiting professor at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT, Cambridge. She has received very many prestigious awards, such as: Hugo Boss Prize (2000), Jerusalem Center for Visual Arts (2010) and Curry Stone Design Prize Finalist (2008) ("Marjetica Potrc at GALERIE NORDENHAKE | Berlin — Stockholm.").

Potrc's works focus on quality of life issues that are affecting people in informal cities. She works with local communities to create long term solutions to these issues. Much of her work is focused on energy and water infrastructure. She documents and interprets suggestions to everyday problems, while providing sensibility to complex everyday issues ("Participatory Design and Storytelling | Curry Stone Design Prize.").

"Citizens are the ones who make the city"

-Marjetica Potrc; ("Participatory Design and Storytelling | Curry Stone Design Prize."

Email Interview Questions

1. activism

As an activist, how do you think you have made/are making an impact in society through your projects/organizations?

_I don't think about myself as an activist. As an artist, I have ability to think outside the box. This helps to imagine new ways of doing things. 'Redirective practice': people from various disciplines and backgrounds work together to find new ways to build a shared community and in the process they attain new knowledge. It is a collective form of action.

2. conventionalism

How do you keep your practice from becoming that of a conventional firm practice?

_Every project is different. Projects are based on local knowledge.

3. exposure

How do you think humanitarian architecture should be represented compared to its current portrayal?

_I am not sure what you mean - I am not aware of 'its current portrayal'. Architecture is made by and for people.

We can learn a lot from humanitarian architecture - architecture imagined and designed in times of crisis can have 'outside the box' approach. In times of crisis, people always go back-to-basics, there is a potential to rethink how things are done.

4. locality

How extensive does the community members' role have to be in a project so that it is "local"?

_I cannot give you numbers. You can measure success of the project by the fact that it stays in place - it is appropriated by residents; and by the fact that it grows to other locations.

Activist

Santiago Cirugeda

Spanish architect.

Cirugeda has a degree in architecture from Universitat Internacional de Catalunya in Barcelona ("Santiago Cirugeda."). He participates in cultural and educational lectures, seminars, conferences, workshops and exhibits. Cirugeda has been a visiting professor at Bogota's Javeriana School (GmbH, Datenflug.).

Cirugeda's work is greatly focused on portraying the citizens' voice. He develops projects that bend the laws of society, as well as creating loopholes to government regulations. He continually encourages residences of cities to interrogate their living environment (Janz, Wes.). Through his attention to social communities and voice, he spreads his objective to allowing architecture to be cheap and available for all ("Spatial Agency: Santiago Cirugeda.").

"Recommends a full research on the different urban locations and situations in which the citizen may want to intervene. " - Santiago Cirugeda ("Recetas Urbanas- Urban Prescriptions.").

Leader

Emily Pilloton

founder of Project H Design, a non-profit charitable organization (Pilloton, Emily.).

Pilloton has a BA from University of California, Berkeley and a MFA in architecture and product design from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (Pilloton, Emily.). She is currently a High School Instructor of Studio H in Bertie County, North Carolina. Pilloton has had a series of presentations within the United States about Project H and her ideals on applying design to empower communities and resolve global issues. She is also the author of Design Revolution ("Emily Pilloton | Profile on TED.com.").

Project H, symbolizing Habitat, Happiness, Humanity and Health, was started in 2007. It is a design team consisting of builders and designers that actively participates in improving their local community and public education systems. Project H jointly created and works with Studio H (also lead by Pilloton). Project H believes design can change the world ("About Us - Mission.").

"Can we really call \$5,000 bamboo coffee tables sustainable?"

- Emily Pilloton; ("Emily Pilloton | Profile on TED.com.").

Thinker

Scott Shall

Scott Shall is an architect and founder of International Design Clinic, a registered non-profit organization ("Idc Assembly | IDC."). Shall received his BA from University of Cincinnati and M.Arch from Tulane University. He is a registered architect that is currently an assistant professor of architecture at the Tyler School of Art at Temple University. Previous to that, he was an assistant professor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette for five years. He is also a principal of SGSA+D, an architectural and design firm. His research has involved the educational theories of Dewey, Schon, and Bruner, and the motivational methods of design and design education. Through his non-profit organization, International Design Clinic (IDC), Shall has presented lectures at a variety of American universities and international facilities ("Scott Shall | Architecture Department Website.").

Shall's work focuses on what he calls guerrilla design. IDC allows students, artist, and designers to use their creative ability to aid communities around the world ("See | IDC."). The students work with hands-on, reality-filled experiences.

"Our work thrives because it is offered humbly, with the understanding that it represents neither the end nor the beginning of the project, but the articulation of a new convergence between curiously disjointed publics, sites and infrastructures. "-International Design Clinic; ("See | IDC.)."

Helper

Chelina Odbert & Jennifer Toy

founders to Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI), a non-profit organization with a concentrates on the improving of land use ("Chelina Odbert and Jennifer Toy."). Odbert has a degree from Claremont McKenna College and a MUP from Harvard University Graduate School of Design (GSD). Toy has her undergraduate degree, MLA, and MUP from Harvard University GSD ("Chelina Odbert and Jennifer Toy").

Odbert and Toy are both currently abroad in Kenya, doing work on three slum sites. While they are actively on site and personally collaborating with the natives, the two are also developing professional discussions on KDI's goal: productive public spaces. They have had round-table discussions with such humanitarian groups as Great Eastern Ecology, Metropolis, Sustainable South Bronx, Urban Think Tank, Design Trust for Public Space, and many more. They have also created a visual campaign to stimulate awareness that reflects their work from KDI. These informative posters were done by several selected artist and graphic designers. They communicated the new methods of thinking about public space in slums and low economical status areas. These images have been distributed in areas of Kenya, New York, and many other major cities ("Chelina Odbert and Jennifer Toy").

"Kounkuey (koon kuh'ie) means to know intimately in Thai"

-("Kounkuey Design Initiative - Info | Facebook.").

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Journals

Journal #1, January 11th, 2011

I started the beginning of my research on humanitarian architecture today. Without much direction on the topic it has been quite interesting while at the same time pretty difficult. The basic search words "humanitarian architecture" brought up a lot of results. Surprisingly the influx of results and variety drastically changes with the simple addition of "how," "what," "where," and "who." After reading the various blogs, articles, forums, definitions, arguments, and firms' mission statements I have a clear-as-mud understanding on the topic. Don't get me wrong, I have read a number of very interesting, motivating, and compelling stories that filled my head with much hope and insight. But it is my ability to catalog and compartmentalize these matters that has made me feel overwhelmed and hopeless. It is very daunting to be presented a variety of methods and perspectives on a topic that one has little comprehension of. On one end of the spectrum, it is nice that so much of the topic is available for research. But on the other end it is difficult to filter the good informative data from the nonsensical and unruly published works. I have discovered that unlike a normal assignment, my thesis will not have a black and white solution. It will, instead, be a compilation of knowledge that I will have gained through the variety of opinions on humanitarian architecture; and in turn it will challenge and shape my own opinions and notions on the matter. I suppose this is very similar to life itself: we simply cannot take everything at face value nor can we believe everything we read and hear. It is our role to pursue understanding through our ability to analyze and criticize various subjects. Possibly with my first meeting next week with Wes Janz, my advisor, a few of the ideas from tonight's initial review can be discerned. Maybe with some level of organization on the matter, I will be able to write up my proposal on the topic.

Journal #2, January 12th, 2011

Possibly with the determined attitude of getting a grasp on this topic, I accomplished a bit more during today's investigation of humanitarian architecture. Potentially by establishing a bit of clarity regarding my goals and a thesis outline, it will be easier to pay attention to the particular ideas and arguments presented within the online articles. During my capstone project investigation, I have three main objectives. My first goal is EXPOSURE. I want to become exposed to the variety of humanitarian architecture outlooks and the many different methods of its practice. My second purpose is APPLICATION. I would like to not only be exposed to these different ideas, but to learn and apply them towards my future works. In addition I want this study to influence me as a person so that my perspective and future criticisms are done with attention to social awareness. My third and final goal is EDUCATE. This idea refers to the concept of not only educating myself on the topic, but to educate others on the subject as well. These forms of educating will more than likely not take the conventional student-to-teacher method, but instead be through projects, conversations, and round table discussions. In addition to forming my objectives, I also managed to boil the whole research project to five main questions that should hold down the vastness of this topic. These questions are: What is it? How does one practice it? Where is it done? Why do people practice it? Why is it not as popular as most other forms of architecture? From today's short, but more manageable research, I was able to break it down to four different lists. The lists are individuals-of-impact that I came across, the non-profit groups, common terms used, and new concepts on the topics. Although the array of non-profit organizations and individuals are important in this research, today I found the different perspectives of the topic to be more appealing. The idea of a pro-bono and dead aid architecture were evident in the online sources that I read. Both

theories are new to me. Pro-bono highlights committing at least 1% of our projects in firms towards local and social architecture. It illustrates the idea that if every architecture firm became involved with non-profit works for their local communities, then this would create architecture that is accessible for everyone. Although the idea of pro-bono is quite glorious, I see it a bit difficult to achieve. This is not because architects are heartless and don't care, but rather it is difficult to find the time within their schedule to provide a three- to six-month commitment to volunteer project. This 1% project would take time and attention from the work that is necessary to pay the bills. The other concept, dead aid, explains how assistance from foreign nations is really harming poverty stricken countries rather than helping them. It describes how the availability of help is causing people to depend on it rather than developing solutions for the problem. This constant international help keeps the people of the assisted country in a continual state of dependency. The author of Dead Aid also goes on to point out that these countries' inability to survive establishes a social weakness within their system. Whether or not it is the countries' low moral or its poster image of impoverishment, these qualities do not help improve its current state. Even though I find dead aid a bit harsh, I also find it relatively true. I find the idea similar to that of "tough love." I do not think that the immediate cut off of aid by foreign countries, as proposed in Dead-Aid, is the best way of pursuing this concept. It may possibly be better if the aid were gradually cut off with a proposed time frame and plan.

Journal #3, January 14th, 2011

I have always understood humanitarian architecture to be a practice that is usually based in poverty-stricken areas. It was always some organization or a couple of individuals working together trying to improve a rundown area or community. The work was also usually done in collaboration with a local member from the community at hand. If humanitarian architecture was not done in a distressed area, then it was practiced in universities. This usually took the role of a professor. I always thought these two potential careers tracks to be a bit limited. However from today's investigation, I found that there are other options when pursuing a career in humanitarian architecture. From an online blog written by Quilian Riano, a Design Agency employee, four common humanitarian architectural practices are identified. The first method is through organized groups and collaborative structures. These tend to be funded by various grants and fellowships. The second method is through involvement with social, political, and economical theories. These could be taken in the role of lectures, discussions, and conferences. The third method is to work closely with an institution that focuses on resolving such social, economical, and political conflicts. The fourth alternative is to work in areas where the inhabitants request and participate towards architecturally improving the conditions. After reading these other approaches to the profession, it was a bit refreshing. The other options allow more multi-participatory arrangement. An individual can pursue several of those paths simultaneously or slowly pursue the separate tracks and merge them together. Despite these four methods, I'm sure there are social architects that are trailblazing different methods to practice the profession. In a way these new methods of practicing are quite important to the field. It is not that there will be enough distressed communities, but rather it will attract more individuals to commit themselves to this profession of impact.

Journal #4, January 15th, 2011

Today was my first meeting w/ Wes, my advisor. Not too sure the meeting was as efficient as it should be. We discussed a lot of the names, terms, and organization. I supposed for a first meeting we covered a lot of ground, however I'm not sure if I have any more clarity on this topic. It has been really difficult trying to come up with a proposal for this assignment. Maybe the honors program should have advised that some research was needed before a stable proposal could be made. Then again, they possibly assumed that I just knew about the subject of my thesis. What is the point of doing a thesis about something you already know? I suppose unless it would be an in depth review of something specific? Humanitarian architecture can be an in depth review of architecture, but it is not the same as architecture. The two are very different. Humanitarian architecture is all muddled up with political and social views. In addition, its code of ethics is quite difficult to please especially with all of the cultural involvement that it takes on. Besides the fact, during our meeting Wes encouraged me to not only take everything in a spoon fed manner, but to rather critically analyze and question the types of existing work. Although the idea is simple, it is slightly frightening. Sometimes it's hard to critically analyze a subject, not because one cannot but rather due to the lack of knowledge and experience. Nevertheless, we shall see.

Wes and I also discussed the various types of things I could do for the outcome of my thesis. During the course of the thesis I will probably do several case studies on the leading humanitarian architecture activists, in which I could be exposed to their methods and work type. In addition I would encounter phrase types that I could review. In terms of review, I would take notice to how they are being used or not being used and analyze the reasons behind the decision. In the end I would write a paper on my knowledge and thoughts established from my case studies and discussions with Wes. I personally wanted to add a bit of design and my initial thought of "humanitarianism" by producing a book that took attention to the rules of design and roughness of social design.

Journal #5, January 18th, 2011

I wrote up my thesis proposal today. I suppose it will work. It sounds rather boring. I wish more design could go into it. Maybe I can change it later after I have a better comprehension on the topic. Wes is busy setting up his art gallery at the University of Minnesota this week. He is all over the place. I think he is also working on publishing a book with David Stairs' class as well as advising nine graduate thesis students. He is not in a studio this semester. I figured his time would be more available, but I guess not. In a way it is pretty cool and exciting that he is involved with all of these different things. He is definitely recognized all around for his work. On a bright note, it is pretty fortunate of me to be working with someone who is so published and distinguished in this topic. Hopefully I will be able to gain a lot of knowledge and contacts through him. While on the flip side, I wish he was not so busy with all these other things. It would be much easier to plan a meeting with him. If he had more free time then I could have more meetings with him and then I am forced, in a sense, to do more work. I would have more clarity and thought in the information I gathered because we could discuss and review it more. It is still early on in the semester; maybe it won't be so bad in a couple of weeks. Plus, I am so busy myself that it is hard to even stay on top of this thesis. I'm still submitting my graduate school applications while balancing studio—which is going terrible. Oh life. Oh agony.

Journal #6, February 3rd, 2011

I haven't worked on my honors thesis in a while. I'm not sure if I should be worried or what, but this can't be a good thing. It is ironic how when something becomes a chore then all interest in the matter is lost, even if much enthusiasm and excitement were earlier expressed. Maybe I could blame the research side of the topic? In my architecture studio this semester I was given the opportunity to pick any building I wanted to design for my project, as well as any site. I choose to do an orphanage. I was pretty excited about it. Soon after a few days, the project became directionless. This made it extremely difficult to pursue. It strayed for two reasons. The first reason is due to an unknowledgeable professor. The second reason, the bigger of the two, is due to that lack of case studies. After researching for "architectural orphanage" multiple times, with varying keywords, the results were very limited. I found only one respectable case study worth analyzing. Regardless of my troubles, what I found most shocking was the lack of examples. It is totally logical that orphanages could not afford elaborate architectural work, however what I found more upsetting is that no one has tried to fund or given charity toward a project. All sorts of humanitarian work are being done, or are said to be done, but yet I could find only one example. An orphanage is a great project to design for humanitarian work. It is ironic that the individuals that need the most well-lit and thoughtfully designed spaces with great air quality are the ones that get neglected on the matter. I hope that through my investigation, I'll realize what type of humanitarian projects and involvements are done. Even afterwards, I hope to have enough knowledge to become responsive towards this type of work.

Journal #7, February 21st, 2011

In preparation for another meeting w/ Wes, I read his book, small architecture BIG LANDSCAPES, that he recently published. The book contains a large collection of works by many leading humanitarian architects as well as their roundtable discussions on current and most controversial issues in the area. In addition, there are articles regarding social design views and arguments.

After reading the first few pages of it, I found that there was a lot of waste being studied in the book. It wasn't your normal "Let's reuse cans in a new creative manner" or "Let's reproduce a certain artifact with a different material" approach, but rather it was a study of waste and viewing in from a different perspective. Usually we tend to view trash as a useless helpless item. Instead, in the book the waste or slum was being analyzed for a sort of informative lesson. I believe the perspectives of the writers are quite logical in this sense, although they are strange. Before we can make sound judgments on things, we must understand it. From my understanding, these issues that are causing social, economical, and political issues are, in a sense, foreign to us. In order to resolve these issues, we should investigate them. Additionally, we should investigate their current uses as well. At times their current uses—in some cases are creative—can inform us and give us a better chance of resolving the problems. This technique of resolving these problems is quite intelligent. We've become rehearsed to forming associations with certain items. These sound judgments can cause us from creatively seeing the solutions. At times, this is definitely one of the biggest creative blocks for design students. I think this may be one of the concepts that separate humanitarian architecture from recycling or normal architecture.

Journal #8, February 24th, 2011

I read some more of Wes' book today. I was able to thoroughly read through some of the articles. I got through several of them, most were extremely interesting. Some I did not comprehend as much as I would have liked too. My favorite essay within the book is titled "Twenty Questions about Homelessness" by Thomas Fisher. Surprisingly the written document is just that, literally 20 questions regarding homelessness. Besides enjoying the piece for its simplicity and directness, I like that it had no answers. The story was open entirely for interpretation. Sometime I believe that we live in a world where too many opinions and influences are being thrown around. Don't get me wrong, maybe it is a good thing—I haven't really thought out all the pros and cons of it—but I do sense that we have constant censorship and propaganda within our media. I know the argument has been made over and over again, but—yes again—is it really freedom if we're constantly being sheltered? Anyways not to stray too far from the main point, but this freedom of interpretation really makes you think about the author's main objective. A lack of opinion can, at times, cause you to ponder more than a given opinion. Fisher's 20 questions did just that to me. It made me ponder. He made several good points through his questions, and he even presented homelessness in a way that I haven't ever really thought of. These questions further reinforce the fact that humanitarian architects and their subjects are thought to be free of judgment and associated opinions. These analyses should be from as clean of a slate as possible. Many of the questions from the composition are written in the first person collective pronoun, we. Fisher's choice of this pronoun demonstrates that everyone is in this together. It is as a collective group that looks for solutions, rather than separate individuals. I wonder if this joint-mass view is held by many social architects, and if this is possibly what separates their work from a conventional architect.

Journal #9, February 28th, 2011

Having a bit more available, I read the rest of the written pieces in small architecture, BIG LANDSCAPES. There were four that were memorable to me, although very sad and disheartening. The authors of these articles are not humanitarian architects; they are still able to paint a very real story because they, like everyone else, are very affected by these social issues in our neighborhoods. Although their essays were written quite differently, it all shared a common theme of community morale. Other than addressing the painful memories they had of their communities' depletion of population and both, social and economical downward conditions, the authors closed the article with their emotional defeats in an austere system. It is most painful to know that these stories derived from a once blooming and booming neighborhood. "D is For...", "Symbols and Signs," "The Past, Present and Future of a Shrinking City," and "Teaching Stories" are all stories that reflect the many types of emotions and events faced in and by a dying community. It is these realizations and these witnesses that scream for help. Sadly enough, these cries are noticed too late—if at all.

These stories and feelings of despair make me ponder a few questions. What is the tipping point? When do these similar experiences become so viral that a group coalesces against it? When is ignoring the problem no longer acceptable? The documents by Young, Wilkins, Willingham, and Sumrall are great at expressing their stories, but they lack intervention. These stories don't provide a solution. Possibly that was Wes' intention upon selecting them. Possibly this is Wes' way of implying the lack of one's solution. Maybe Wes picked these stories to share this feeling of despair to the people of booming and bustling economies. However, it is stories with hope and solution that we need. People are all too familiar with these stories. People have had bad days, have felt heartache, and have heard on the news one too many times of the angry man holding hostages at gunpoint. It doesn't take much storytelling to cause the reader to feel sadness and sympathy. There are a lot of people in the world that experience pain. Although I am early in my knowledge of the subject, I feel that these stories of despair cannot be the path to a solution. There is only so much heart left that we can't afford to demolish it. I can't say for sure what is the solution, just as Wes' implies, but I believe that whatever it is, it is not sad stories causing the a loss of energy and enthusiasm in a place where little is found.

Journal #10, March 10th, 2011

After having read the articles within Wes' book, he suggested some individuals listed in the book for me to interview. These individuals are all quite well known in the works of "humanitarian architecture." Small architecture BIG LANDSCAPES presented a few projects and discussions done by these individuals, but additional research is needed. Antonio Scarponi, Santiago Cirugeda, Marjetica Potrc, Emily Pilloton, and Jennifer Toy and Chelina Odbert were the individuals that we decided my humanitarian architectural knowledge should become further acquainted with. Wes suggested them because they were all very involved people doing very excellent work in the field. From the selected list, Emily Pilloton was the only individual I was familiar with. I thought this was extremely surprising. I had done previous researches on the leading activist of humanitarian architecture, and the subject itself, but never once came across those other names. A part of me wonders why these people's names did not come up if they are such renowned humanitarian architecture figures. Another part of me is curious as to if they associated such terms of "humanitarian architects" within their work description. It is a common thing for humanitarian architects to disassociate themselves with the term. The projects, philosophy, and method of work for these individuals varies so much that it is not always suited with "humanitarian architecture."

Journal #11, March 17th, 2011

Santiago Cirugeda was my first individual to do research on out of the collective group of five. Cirugeda's work was extremely different than how I had always envisioned and understood humanitarian architecture to be. Humanitarian architecture work, as I had always thought, consisted of working closely with community members in a lower economical status or reestablishing the use of certain materials and technique so that it was better enhancing its user and context. Cirugeda's work was more concerned with awareness and rights for citizens. His projects were created within the communities, although they were not specifically assisted by community members. Many of his pieces tend to bend society's rules and regulations. Although without a doubt, Cirugeda would explain that such laws were open for interpretation. From the various websites I read, Cirugeda seems to take on a philosophy of representing underprivileged citizens. In addition he wanted to provoke these citizens to analyze the government's role in their life.

Cirugeda work is quite different than how I imagined humanitarian architecture, but yet it screams "why not?" towards my humanitarian architecture theory. Yes, his work isn't ignited by community members approaching him nor does it take place in the third or fourth world. But it does represent the community and challenges our way of thinking. I don't think humanitarian architecture needs to have this black-and-white description of what it is and what it is not--like any other creative processes, it can take various forms. Cirugeda's work is about pushing the limits of the law, and analyzing the rules of the government. He wants the people to acknowledge the different conditions their life can be in if the different interpretations are created. He changes the built environment through his architectural installations of physical additions. It is about social awareness and social justice which boils down to the key elements of "humanitarian."

Journal #12, March 21st, 2011

The second individual in the group that I chose to review is Antonio Scarponi. This selection of work was similar to that of Cirugeda's, although different than my previous idea of "humanitarian architecture." Scarponi's projects were not aimed towards the law as that of Cirugeda's. His work deals with awareness and methods of bettering the community and environment. Scarponi's work ranges from both small personal size products to larger community size products. In addition, not all of his work takes a 3D form that influences a space. He has a collection of projects that graphically communicates various statistics within the world.

I think Scarponi's method of being a social activist is refreshing. Although it is similar to Cirugeda's work, I find Scarponi's to be a bit more energizing because he takes on very many different projects underlining the same core value of community improvement and social awareness. The projects range from a personal purse to a community wall and they don't all take the same context as most of the other leading social activists. In addition the various forms his works take allow it to affect a larger audience. Often, they are framed by a specific time commitment needed from its audience. This is a nice quality because it allows all sorts of people to quickly understand the project's concept and story without having them be an individual with interest in Scarponi or humanitarian architecture. Another thing that I find completely excellent about Scarponi is that he does not ever address how he wants to better the community through his work, or help these other citizens understand bigger or better ideas. He never gives the impression that such people need help, and not to mention—specifically HIS help. Instead Scarponi just creates works that he believes will help better society. There isn't a standard or certain regulation that he and the works abide by. I also appreciate Scarponi's ability to work with both the most recent technological advance and analog technology. It is nice to see humanitarian architecture with such a variety of form, and a very different form than that I had believed when first starting this thesis.

Journal #13, March 24th, 2011

This previous evening I was able to witness Emily Pilloton talk about her humanitarian architecture work. She was the third individual on my list of leading humanitarian figures to investigate. Of the five individuals on my list of leading social architects to study, Pilloton was the only individual I was familiar with. Pilloton does work through her non-profit organization she calls "Project H Design." The work of the program focuses on health, humanity, habitats and happiness. She and the organization have done work in San Francisco, Mexico City, and Johannesburg. After getting criticism on her projects and lack of international understanding, Pilloton revamped the organization a bit and refocused their key philosophies within their projects. Currently Pilloton is working as a teacher in Bertie County, North Carolina. The classroom program is called Studio H, and teaches hands on math and design skills to high school students, while at the same time involving the local community.

The work that Pillton does is exactly what I thought humanitarian architecture consisted of when I started this thesis. She worked closely with lower class communities and her organization, Project H, focused on assignments that helped to improve the lives of others. It is surprising, but Pillton is the only individual from my group of five that has received criticism for her work. In addition, Pilloton's work is really recognized through many publicized non-profit groups and humanitarian aid organizations. Maybe I am being biased, but it is without a doubt that Pillton and Project H are much more popular within the realm of social architects than many of the other people. This makes me wonder if publicity is an important factor in social architecture. I would agree that to an extent it is important to build up awareness to one's organization, name, and projects, but at the same time, I can't help but wonder if some of the architects are more

concerned with creating an image rather than being fully committed to their philosophy. Sometimes it's hard to not let the limelight of the job get in the way of the real humanitarian work. Pillton continues to receive much questioning on where she gets the money for the program she teaches at Studio H. The program is not funded locally, and that brings in questionings of how the community officials and residents feel about her program and project.

Although Pillton's work is the only square peg that fits into the square idea I had for humanitarian architecture, I am not sure her work is the one that I most idolized or hope to aspire too. I feel that works of Scarponi which exist at very many different sizes and levels of awareness are much stronger. It is much more multifaceted in expression and technology. In addition many of them take a different creative idea, allowing him to continually develop on the definition of social architecture.

Journal #14, March 29th, 2011

The fourth and most different humanitarian architecture leader that I analyzed is Marjetica Potrc. Potrc is an artist that does an array of works regarding social justice. She is normally commissioned with projects that work closely with water and energy infrastructures.

The thing that I find most interesting about Potrc is her ability to do cross-disciplinary work. She is an artist that does architectural projects, and her art works evidence an awareness of architectural issues. It is very common to associate architecture with art, but not vice versa. Potrc however is successful in combining the two professions, but yet allowing art to be the foundation. When I had emailed Potrc with interview questions, in one of her answers she referred to "redirective practice" which is the idea of cross collaborations between many different professions to resolve an issue. This makes a lot of sense. For a selection of people who consider themselves a community or society, there is little sharing done. If everyone evenly contributed, solutions would be easier to achieve. In addition, cross-disciplinary practices would allow for many areas of expertise to evolve. Potrc also refers "back to the basics" as methods of finding solutions. I can't help but agree with her in this answer as well. It is all very common for us to get so caught up in these new technologies and software advances that we neglect the basics of our production tools. At times, we even forget the main idea of the objective because all the ornate clutters that pulls our attention. At Pilloton's lecture that I attended last week, someone had asked Pilloton during the Q&A session "if you think our society is too caught up on the aesthetics of a product," by which I'm sure they meant as falling short of the functionality. This all happens too often within the design field.

Journal #15, April 1st, 2011

Chelina Odbert and Jen Toy are two landscape architects that are the leaders of Kounkuey Design Initiative, a design group currently on three sites in Kenya working on community issues. These issues specifically regard youth employment, trash collection, flood prevention and water improvement.

Odbert and Toy's work also closely resembles my idea of humanitarian architecture before I started this study. The two of them are trying to better a community in the 3rd world through local collaboration. While I was doing research on the Kounkuey designs, I came across a post from Odbert explaining her current task in providing electricity for the community. Beside the main point of electricity within in the article, Odbert also presents the issue that her organization is supporting an outlaw of the community. It appears in the article that Kounkuey Design Initiative has paired with an individual who steals electricity from the Nairobi government to later provide it for the various nearby communities. This certain individual considers himself an activist, while some call him a criminal. I thought the issue of determining an activist versus a criminal to be quite interesting.

I think that many individuals within the profession of humanitarian architecture have to slightly bend the rules. The necessity to think creatively within the design field is itself breaking the rules. There is a strong blur between wrong and right when an issue is in need of a new resolution. In addition, just because something is "illegal" does not mean it's particularly wrong. Cirugeda would strongly agree with this. In addition, some of the greatest inventions, questions, actions, and ideas in history were at one point illegal and not accepted.

Journal #16, April 8th, 2011

As today was one of my last meetings with Wes, we went over the questions that I would like to ask the individuals I have reviewed over the past couple of weeks. It is really hard to question a subject when one is inexperienced in it, or in general just inexperienced and unknowledgeable at all. I'm not sure critical analysis comes that easily to some individuals. Nevertheless, I had quite an array of questions to ask regarding humanitarian architecture. The specific topics that the questions referred to were: the conventional practice of architecture, their potential impact, community barriers, locality of task, good design versus design, and reception of ideas. Although these topics are very different, they are all topics that have been in strong discussion and questioning between Wes and I this semester.

After close review, I was able to narrow it down to four questions that I would ask via email to Emily Pilloton, Marjetica Potrc, Antonio Scarponi and Scott Shall. Scott Shall is the leader of International Design Clinic, who I studied prior to this semester. These individuals were selected based on their availability and likelihood to answers my questions. The four questions that I asked these four individuals are as follows:

ACTIVISM: As an activist, how do you think you have made/are making an impact in society through your projects/organizations?

CONVENTIONALISM: How do you keep your practice from becoming that of a conventional firm practice?

EXPOSURE: How do you think humanitarian architecture should be represented compared to its current portrayal?

LOCALITY: How extensive does the community members' role have to be in a project so that it is "local"?

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